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FORESTRY—
TO THE PUBLIC

By

AL BARDEN

FORESTRY and forestry work today have the record of being among the fastest expanding industries in the nation. There are many phases of the work which have become major industries in themselves. One of the important parts of forestry work is the education of the public. Education is a big job, no matter how it's approached. There are many age groups and many backgrounds to deal with in putting the information over to the people.

Education is very important to the forestry program that is being carried out by many states and by the federal government. Mistakes in management and utilization can and will be made in the future as they have been in the past. However, by teaching the public the importance of proper management and utilization, many of those mistakes can be done away with at a great saving of money.

Certainly educating the older people, those in business for themselves for many years, is one of bringing actual facts and figures of improvements to them. Then a lot of sales talk is necessary to show why any change from present procedure would be advantageous. There will be changes in equipment and management to face and those changes will probably be an out-of-pocket expense right at the present time. The problem is to show how over a long period of time the change will increase profits.

This problem is solved to a certain extent with younger businessmen. They have the opportunity to attend a forestry school which will give them practical experience in the newer aspects of the profession. This is vitally important to advancement of new developments in the several branches of forestry. As the younger men go into business, they too are good carriers of the better methods of management and new developments in utilization.

The education of men interested in forestry directly to the total population of 150,000,000 people in the United States. There must be some way of reaching more persons.

A general understanding of forestry by the public will make the job of professional foresters and conservation men much easier. Any legislation that comes before a governing body would be sanely considered with a little more interest than is now shown in it in some places. Too many people think that conservation means no use. However, records show that conservation is wise use of the resources under consideration, be it wildlife, fish, or timber.

If there is no use, the mature trees will die, fall, and decay, thus losing the volume produced. Also in considering recreation in such an area the fallen and rotted timber would present an unattractive place for hiking, hunting, or picnicking. On the contrary, if the timber is used as it shows signs of passing maturity and good health, the forest is kept attractive for sportsmen and picnickers. A return has been realized for the labor that has been put in the forest in harvesting operations and whatever improvements may have been put into the area.

For example, many thousands of acres have been set aside as state forests in the state of Wisconsin. The dead timber is sold to individuals for a low rate to be used by them as firewood. Resale is not permitted and the wood must be removed by the buyer. That wood is of no further value as far as the forest is concerned, but by selling it, the state realizes a return for the use of the land for forest production. The limbs and refuse go back on the land for humus. Another advantage of the sale of timber is the construction of temporary roads throughout the forest. The buyer puts roads through the forest at his own expense. Then in time of emergency, the state can use those roads at no expense to itself.

The mature green timber is cut out also. This keeps the condition of the remaining stand better and maintains its vigor until the next part of the stand reaches maturity. Again this brings money into the state treasuries for more proof that conservation, or wise use, is better management than no use.
These are just a few ways of illustrating that a general knowledge of forestry and conservation is essential to many people. This may not necessarily be only legislators who have the information. Instead the general public, too, should have it. They are the voters who choose the officials of the government and they should have a knowledge of what the candidates stand for in the line of conservation and forestry procedures. However, that is only a minor reason when one stops to think of how important are recommendations the public makes to the legislature concerning wildlife policies.

If the public is well informed, the recommendation is one that will benefit all—the resource and the users. However, a poorly informed public doesn’t have enough facts to make an honest evaluation of the situation at hand.

The best way to present information to the public is by distribution of pamphlets and special editions of papers and magazines. Such emphasis brings the topic to the attention of the public and they are ready for the next stage of development to the education program. That would be public service programs on several local radio stations scattered throughout the area where that topic is vital.

These public service programs could be in the form of panel discussions, of debates, or of an interview with someone with a good backlog of information on the subject at hand. In order to be effective, the program should be carefully arranged to hold the most interest for the majority of the listening public. An attempt must be made to keep the programs from becoming boring or too technical for most listeners.

If the area in which the educational program is being carried out is relatively small, boxholders might be sent out. The intensity of the campaign would determine whether meetings would be held formally or whether that would be up to local leaders in conservation and forestry.

This discussion of how to present the facts to the public can be used for forestry work, for wildlife management, or for conservation in general. If it were for wildlife or conservation management some attention should be given to the season at which the information is presented.

Another measure that is occasionally used when the situation is particularly shocking is the “show me” trip. This constitutes taking important and influential businessmen, who have a knowledge of the wildlife or forestry, on trips through areas that typically illustrate the problems. This particular method was used to convince the public in the northwestern United States of the need of thinning the deer and elk herds a few years ago. The herds were growing faster than browse and the animals were literally eating themselves out of house and home.

“Show me” trips were organized from larger cities and important businessmen got a chance to see the starvation first hand. When they got back home, they could see the reasons for wanting open seasons on the animals to bring their numbers down to the rate of growth of the browse. A newspaper editor, a radio station manager, and a banker or real estate dealer are excellent businessmen for the trip. In an occasion such as occurred in the Northwest, where public sentiment must be swayed, those men mentioned above have about as much influence and ability to contact the people as anyone in the community. For reasons of publicity the men or women taken on such a trip should be chosen carefully. The intimation of this discussion has been that only wildlife could be the object of such trips. That is not true, though less often is it opportune to show disaster in this manner in the forests. The main reason is that timber isn’t as dependent on a quick decision to maintain life as is a herd of deer or elk. It can be publicized by the slower methods described earlier in this article and still have time to save the stand from forthcoming great loss.

Such is the job of bringing information to the general public. That covers many of the people in any business for themselves. However, a better program is being set up in some places. That is education on the high school level. Surely if the students have a fundamental education in forestry and conservation when they are graduated from high school, they will be more interested in the program that is set up for adults. That will make a little easier job for the campaigners in adult education. Of course the adult program will have to still be keyed to needs of people who never had the opportunity to get conservation in school.

The high school course may be set up as a general course in conservation and forestry. It may be a series of courses that would run over a period of three or four semesters. Those students who are more interested in the subject should have the opportunity to take more advanced course in their junior and senior years. This advanced work should still be as general as possible, not dwelling specifically on any phase of forestry or conservation work. That would give the students a chance to see what the various kinds of work amount to but the economic side of the picture is considered for the administration.

After the students who are going to become professional foresters or conservationists enter college, there is still time to specialize in the field of their particular choice. That is why the high school forestry and conservation should be kept to general information.

An important part of the class work should be field trips taken any time an observation will strengthen the text and lecture material. Often these trips can be to the school or community forest. A trip might be arranged with an individual land-owner if his property shows the condition under study. Several of these trips should be taken each year for the most effective instruction of the class.

Programs in high schools in which such field trips are taken, are very new where they exist at all. For
example, the first such program in the state of Wiscon-
sin has been set up to begin in the 1952-1953 school
year. Merrill High School one of the larger schools
in northern Wisconsin, is the originator of the class-
room-trip practice.

Conservation and forestry courses have been in-
cluded in many of the school curriculums throughout
the state of Wisconsin. Doubtless it will be but a
matter of time before those schools with conserva-
tion courses have the trips with classroom study in
their plan of instruction.

Most schools of the agricultural region of the mid-
western United States don't have even the general
course of conservation and forestry. This includes both
the large municipal high schools with thousands of
dollars behind their operations, and the small school
without funds for the extra instructor the course may
require. Iowa is typical of this situation. The main
reason is there aren't many forests in those midwest-
ern states to promote any interest in. Therefore the
emphasis is much decreased in this section of the
country as compared with emphasis placed on con-
servation and forestry in eastern schools.

Many of the schools of the eastern seaboard states
have conservation programs included in their educa-
tional systems. North and South Carolina, Florida,
and New York have these courses in their high
schools. An exception to this is New Jersey. New Jer-
sey doesn't have any conservation or forestry program
in its public high school system.

The state of New York also has a ranger school to
which high school graduates may go. After taking
two years of instruction at the ranger school, the
young men are qualified to work as state rangers on
any New York state forest. However, a disadvantage
is that only residents of New York are eligible for
enrollment in the school. This is not an accredited
forestry school by the Society of American Foresters.

Wisconsin high schools send groups of students to
a spring camp for practical instruction in many phases
of forestry work. The camp is operated by a corpora-
tion of paper mills and power companies in Wiscon-
sin. Only a minimum is charged for the three day stay
at the camp. The group goes on bus trips around the
northern part of the state to view industries, watersh-
ded control, and wildlife and fish management.

Classes are held in class rooms at the camp in
Eagle River during times when no trips are scheduled.
A quiz is given at the close of the period at the camp.
Those students that pass it, and most of them do, get
certificates of attendance at the camp. Two groups
of twenty students are at the camp at the same time.
When those groups leave at the end of their three
days, two groups from another two schools come in
and the program starts over again.

The camp runs from about the 20th of March until
June 1st for high school students. As the camp was
used for high school students only the last four years,
the program and capacity have been expanding each
year. During the summer and fall, groups of adults
come in for tours much like the high school students
do in the spring. Those groups are often educators,
women's clubs, and civic groups. Also, a five week
conservation course is offered during June and July
for training prospective teachers who are attending
state schools. Six credits are allowed as an added in-
centive for getting people to take the course. Most of
the groups of adults go through workshops right at
the camp in addition to the trips they take on the
buses.

Since its establishment seven years ago as an edu-
cational institution, the camp has been a major method
of bringing information to the public. The popu-
ality of the camp after each successive season is an
indication that those who attended camp spread the
knowledge they obtained during their stay. That
means the camp is well worth the investment the
guiding corporation is putting into it.

After the initial interest in conservation and forestry
has been created, high school graduates will attend
regular forestry schools for more complete instruction
in the field in which they choose to work. The school
they choose may depend on several personal control-
ing factors. Money available is many times the most
important consideration. Other items are the branch
of work the student wants to go into, the subjects that
are offered, and sometimes the distance from home.

Also a point which is a deciding factor in where the
individual goes to school is whether he wants to go to
junior college first to get minor subjects out of the
way. If so, the decision on where to go is made on
much the same basis as one to go directly to a school
with four-year courses.

After the choice of schools has been made, the
next decision to be made is what particular branch of
forestry or conservation the student wants to get into
if he hasn't already decided. Those schools which have
only a two-year forestry curriculum don't have the
definite division of the separate branches of forestry.
One example of this is the University of Wisconsin.

Schools with four-year curriculums have some dis-
tinction between Forest Management and Forest Utili-
zation, etc. The schools which have been accredited
by the Society of American Foresters have a more
distinct division between branches of forestry than
do pre-forestry schools.

Forestry is one of the most important industries in
the nation and, in fact, the world. Education in con-
servation and forestry can make the many branch in-
dustries more important yet to the national economy.
Management in wildlife would assure the country of
plentiful game for the table, for the camera, and for
posterity. Better management in forestry will equalize
the board foot growth-cutting ratio. Again the public
will benefit. But it will be many years before some of
these things are accomplished without educational
programs. That seems to be the key to a lot of Amer-
ica's future—Education!